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ABSTRACT

Improved dissemination and utilization of results from statewide assessment of student performance is critically needed. Prior research shows that less than one third of all states can provide evidence of using such data to make significant classes of decisions most frequently cited as a justification for the initiation of such programs. Yet the annual budgets for assessment programs continue to escalate. The evidence suggests that while statewide assessment programs are frequently initiated as part of accountability movements, they are seldom accountable themselves. In an attempt to deal with this problem, the Oregon assessment program has initiated a variety of innovative steps designed to insure effective dissemination and maximum utilization of annual testing results. Some of these efforts include: extensive interviewing and research to establish a clear purpose for the program; identification of major policy questions to be impacted by assessment results; prior research to determine the most effective dissemination modes for selected decision-making audiences; widespread use of professional and lay advisory committees in the design, conducting, interpretation, and reporting of data; simultaneous release of results, interpretations, and recommendations for actions to specific audiences; initiation of a state management system to systematically utilize assessment findings in specific decisions; continuing evaluation of all dissemination and utilization strategies; and followup contacts with key decision-makers to assure utilization. (Author)

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DISSEMINATION AND UTILIZATION OF ASSESSMENT RESULTS IN OREGON

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to

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ABSTRACT

Dissemination and Utilization of Assessment Results in Oregon

Improved dissemination and utilization of results from statewide assessment of student performance is critically needed. Prior research shows that less than one third of all states can provide evidence of using such data to make significant classes of decisions most frequently cited as a justification for the initiation of such programs. Yet the annual budgets for assessment programs continue to escalate. The evidence suggests that while statewide assessment programs are frequently initiated as part of accountability movements, they are seldom accountable themselves.

In an attempt to deal with this problem, the Oregon assessment program has initiated a variety of innovative steps designed to insure effective dissemination and maximum utilization of annual testing results. Some of these efforts include: extensive interviewing and research to establish a clear purpose for the program; identification of major policy questions to be impacted by assessment results; prior research to determine the most effective dissemination modes for selected decision-making audiences; widespread use of professional and lay advisory committees in the design, conducting, interpretation and reporting of data; simultaneous release of results, interpretations and recommendations for actions to specific audiences; initiation of a state management system to systematically utilize assessment findings in specific decisions; continuing evaluation of all dissemination and utilization strategies; and follow-up contacts with key decision-makers to assure utilization.

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For the past two years, I have been collecting data for a comparative survey of statewide assessment programs throughout the country. One significant finding from this study was that while 69 percent of the states indicate that they use their statewide assessment results to establish priorities for Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, less than one third of the states could provide evidence of using this data to make other types of decisions which are frequently cited as a justification for the initiation of statewide assesment programs.[1]

Compare these findings with the results of a recent survey by the U.S. Office of Education, where it was estimated that State Departments of Education are spending a minimum of $5 million annually to produce student assessment data required for decision-making under Title III, ESEA.[2]

The development of statewide assessment programs are usually tied to the movement for accountability within public education. But really, just how accountable are statewide assessment programs themselves? The two topics I will speak to, dissemination and utilization, appear to me to be the key to answering this question.

Successful utilization of state assessment data is primarily dependent on clearcut agreements about the purposes of the program and the decisions which will be made as a result of assessment findings.

Oregon's first steps to define the purpose of its statewide assessment program were taken in the fall of 1972 when the University of Oregon, under contract to the

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1 Hall, Mary, "Statewide Assessment of Student Performance: A Comparative Study," presented at Symposium on Advances in the Methodology of Statewide Assessment, American Educational Research Association, 1975 Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C. p. 12.

2 Hershkowitz, Martin, Statewide Educational Needs Assessment: Results from Selected Model States, Hershkowitz Associates, Silver Springs, Maryland, 1974, p. 7.

Department, conducted a series of 45 interviews to determine the types of educational decisions which might be made using student assessment results. The population for these interviews was chosen on a very scientific basis - "Power." The individuals were those who were felt to be "movers and shakers" within the state and national legislature, state governing boards, school superintendent organizations, universities, teacher organizations, research and development organizations, local school boards and the Department itself. From these interviews, the University recommended that ten major purposes be established for the program, of which five purposes related to decision-making by the State Board of Education and five to decision-making by the Department and the Legislature.[3] The keying of program purposes to specific decision-making audiences is a point which I will want to address later. These recommendations were used as the basis for presenting the initial program request to the 1973 Oregon Legislature. They were also used as the basis for planning the first pilot assessment - for like most states, Oregon has planned and implemented its assessment concurrently.

In 1974, the assessment staff further refined these 10 statements of general purpose into a set of sixteen "policy questions" which the program might potentially attempt to answer. A questionnaire on these "policy questions" was sent to a variety of decision-making audiences throughout the state - this time including key statewide advisory committees charged with making program recommendations to the Board of Education for specific audiences (i.e., deaf, blind, migrant and so forth). Results were tabulated both by total rank (i.e., those policy questions thought to be most

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3 Mattson, Robert H., A Conceptual Model for Statewide Assessment, report to the State Department of Education from the University of Oregon's College of Education, February, 1973, pp. 29-30.

important to everyone) and within response groups. This gave us even further data on the decision-making needs of special bodies.[4]

These two sources of interview and questionnaire data, coupled with discussions with the Statewide Assessment Advisory Committee, the State Board of Education and technical advisory committees, were further refined into four statements of purpose for the program,[5] which are now included in the long-range plan currently pending before the Oregon Legislature.

While establishing agreed-upon purposes for statewide assessment was an important first step, an equally important step to Oregon was the creation of specific decision-making processes to insure that the assessment data was actually used.

Beginning in 1972, the Oregon Board of Education had already made a commitment to initiating a 10-step management system which began with the setting of statewide goals for elementary and secondary education and included the use of assessment data as a way of moving from these general goals to the identification of specific priorities for action. Time does not permit a discussion of the specific operation of this system,[6] but a few key types of decisions based on the assessment data might be of particular interest:

- Once every four years, the Board will use assessment data to revise its state priorities. To assist with this, assessment reports are generated to key state advisory committees, who in turn, make recommendations about instructional and management areas needing special

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[4] See Appendix A for ranks assigned to policy questions.

[5] See Appendix B for statement of purposes.

[6] See Appendix C for overview of Board of Education management system.

attention. Immediately following the adoption of the priorities, proposed accomplishments (objectives) are developed specifying the type of action and results anticipated for the next four years.

- Every two years, the state priorities are used as the basis for planning the Department's biennial budget and the Board's legislative program - including requests for operational funds as well as for grant-in-aid to targeted areas. For example, information collected during the pilot assessment in reading indicated that some regions of the state did not have adequate access to reading specialists. A grant-in-aid request to solve this problem was included in the Department's budget. Data also showed that students included in Title I of ESEA tended to score lower than other student groups. The Board's 1975 Legislative Program included a recommendation that state monies be added to federal funds to provide specialized reading services to this population. The assessment data also influenced the Board's decision to request grant-in-aid funds for services to bilingual populations.

- The Board's priorities also impact on the criteria used by the State Textbook Commission to review and adopt state-recommended instructional materials The results of the pilot assessment were used by the Commission late this fall to make decisions about the degree to which texts emphasizing certain reading skills should be represented on the adoption lists.

- Finally, assessment data is intended to impact on the day-to-day operations of the State Department in helping to identify particular areas to which services should be increased or decreased. To be certain that the reading results achieve this impact, the State Superintendent has directed the Right-to-Read staff to prepare an "action plan" specifying specific activities that will be undertaken during the remainder of this year and during the next biennium to address some of the problem areas indicated in the results. This plan will affect the "mix" of state services such as training, on-site technical assistance, development of supplementary curriculum materials and sponsoring of special demonstration projects.

Thus far, my comments about utilization have focused on the Board of Education, the Department, state advisory committees and state professional groups such as the Textbook Commission. Two other important "user" audiences are the Oregon Legislature and schools participating in the state assessment program.

It is still too early to determine the long-term impact that statewide assessment will have on decisions by these two audiences. However, preliminary findings are encouraging.

- One significant piece of legislation has been introduced in the Oregon Senate calling for adoption of a state policy on "the right-to-read" and requesting several million dollars during the next two years to address specific areas of weakness. The bill includes a request for reading specialists, provides for specialized services to student groups who did not score well on the test, includes funds for research and development to provide solutions to questions raised by the assessment (i.e., why did girls score better than boys?) and calls for modifications in teacher training in reading.

- Several participating school districts have used the results to either question or validate results seen on their own local testing programs.

- At least one district chose to administer the assessment instrument to all of their fourth graders and to use the results for instructional evaluation on a district-wide basis. Several additional districts are expected to choose this option in 1975 and the state will continue to encourage districts to "buy in" to expanded use of state assessment instruments as these meet particular local needs.

- Procedures and materials developed by the state assessment program are also being viewed by local districts as one prototype which may be copied in implementing their own local assessment design. New State Minimum School Standards require that by the end of the 1970's, all Oregon districts will conduct student assessment of program goals.

Finally, let me briefly review the various dissemination strategies which have been used in Oregon thus far. As I mentioned earlier, the planning for Oregon's assessment program has been predicated on the basis that: a) different decision-making audiences have needs for different types of information, and b) this information must be delivered through a "medium" appropriate to their use and operation.

Basic data for this "diversified" approach was collected during July of 1974 when the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, under contract to the Department,

conducted structured phone interviews with 35 individuals recommended as "representative" of key decision-making groups.[7] These included university faculty Intermediate Education District and public school administrators, Department of Education administrators and staff, reading teachers and specialists, state advisory committees, professional teacher associations, legislative staff members and staff working on new policies affecting reform of basic school financing. Data was collected relating to several areas. These included:

- Possible additional analyses
- Degree of interest on the nine reporting variables and on statistics currently planned for the reports
- Concerns specifically related to reporting assessment results
- Questions that interviewees thought should be addressed in the reports
- Reservations about the pilot assessment and suggestions for future assessments

To a large extent, the results from these interviews influenced the type of dissemination strategy chosen, so let me review the type of dissemination activities keyed to special audiences carried out thus far:

General Public

- Prior to the public release of any data, statewide panels of teachers, parents, curriculum specialists, board members, administrators and the general public were pulled together to review and analyze the results and to make recommendations for action to specific audiences such as classroom teachers, districts, curriculum groups, the State Board and the Oregon Legislature.
- These recommendations, plus an overview of the assessment results, were presented at a statewide press conference and were included in a "popularized" report. The General Report received widespread dissemination throughout the state. Press releases were tailored to both state and regional media. According to our clipping service, the subject of reading received more press coverage in the 60 days following the press conference than at any time during the last six years.

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[7] Interim Technical Report: Interviews to Determine the Information Needs of Target Audiences for the 1973-74 Oregon Statewide Assessment Program, report by Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory to Department of Education, August, 1974.

- A small brochure briefly describing the assessment program and listing the types of reports available to the public was also prepared and distributed - particularly in response to out-of-state requests for information.

- A special issue of a Department newsletter sent to some 1,000 key educational decision-makers in Oregon was also devoted to the assessment results. Extra copies of the newsletter were made available to meet requests from large groups, such as conferences, where the distribution of the general report would have been prohibitively expensive.

State Board and Department

- An "executive summary" of the assessment results was prepared for use by the State Board and presented at a special briefing arranged for this group.

- Special briefings were also organized for Department staff, and these have been followed-up by more informal contact with staff specifically interested in the assessment results as they relate to specific populations.

Oregon Legislature

- During fall of 1974 and winter of 1975, the assessment staff met separately with 15 key legislators. These meetings had two major purposes: One, to personally acquaint these individuals with the results of the pilot assessment and to answer general questions they might have about the program; and two, to seek their advice on the best method of presenting assessment data to the Oregon Legislature. Interestingly, freshmen legislators recommended that the results be disseminated through personal meetings with all key legislators. More experienced legislators suggested that an interesting slide-tape presentation on the results be prepared and that briefings on the results be organized for key committees.[8]

- Based on these recommendations, both approaches were used. A 20 minute slide-tape presentation on the assessment program and the pilot testing results was prepared and shown at special hearings arranged for the House and Senate Education Committees. The response was most favorable. Additional individual meetings were also held, especially with legislators who will make the decision on the 1975-77 budget level for the statewide assessment program.

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[8] Of the 15 legislators included in this study, 9 were in the House and 6 in the Senate. Four of the legislators were freshmen, with the remaining eleven ranging from 4 to 18 years of service. A structured questionnaire was used with the legislators giving them several alternative modes for dissemination of assessment results. All four freshmen legislators picked "personal meetings" as the single most effective means of communicating assessment results. Specially-arranged committee hearings, a slide-tape presentation, brief written reports and personal meetings were selected, in rank order, by the more experienced legislators, with the most experienced members consistently recommending the committee hearing as the single most effective method of sharing assessment results.

- All members of the House and Senate Education committees received copies of the Executive Summary and the General Report, along with the copy of the special newsletter. All other members of the Legislature received copies of the General Report.

Statewide Organizations

- The General Report and a special briefing tailored to their pending decision on reading texts, was given to the Oregon State Textbook Commission.

- Copies of the newsletter were provided to the Oregon Education Association for distribution to their 400 local unit officers. A special meeting was also held with the governing board of OEA to discuss the assessment program and secure input for future planning. In addition, the assessment staff will be participating in two separate workshops to be jointly sponsored by the Department and OEA later this spring to discuss statewide movements towards accountability.

- Copies of either the general report or the newsletter were also made available to key statewide advisory committees, such as the Intergroup Human Relations Council and the Right-to-Read Committee, as well as the Statewide Assessment Advisory Committee.

School Audiences

- Specialized reports were prepared for the participating schools allowing for an analysis of results on both a school and individual student basis. A "user manual" was developed and distributed, providing information on how to interpret the results and also cautioning against misuse and miscommunication of the data. Schools had the option of having the results sent only to the district, to the school administrator, to classroom teachers, to all three or to none of the above.

- The General Report was distributed to all other interested school audiences.

- Three technical reports were also prepared - one covering general information on the planning and background of the program, the second providing details on the assessment procedures and results, and the third covering interpretation and recommendations. These were shared with limited educational audiences - primarily planning and evaluation staffs in the schools.

- The assessment staff is also currently working with the Right-to-Read staff on the feasibility of issuing a specialized manual for reading teachers. This manual would tie assessment results to specific recommendations for corrective instructional techniques and materials.

- Speeches on the assessment program and pilot year results have also been given or are scheduled at a wide variety of educational meetings, including sessions with the Oregon School Boards Association, statewide administrator groups, equal opportunity interest groups and language arts councils.

The dissemination and utilization plans for the Oregon Statewide Assessment program are still evolving and will undoubtedly be changed as more experience and data becomes available. Throughout this process, however, the Oregon staff has become increasingly committed to the notion that the expense and effort of statewide assessment can only be justified if:

- There is clearcut agreement upon the purposes of the programs;
- States carefully design decision-making processes to be certain that the data is actually used for these purposes;
- Adequate staff and financial resources are provided for effective utilization and dissemination;
- Dissemination strategies are carefully chosen to get the information in the most usable and appropriate way to differentiated audiences.

After all, aren't these four elements what "accountability" is all about?

APPENDIX A

RANKS ASSIGNED TO POLICY QUESTIONS

RANK	
1	1. To what extent have pupils attained skills, knowledges, and attitudes related to the six life roles identified in the OBE goals?
2-3	2. To what extent have pupils attained skills (competencies) elaborated in the Oregon Graduation Requirements?
4	3. To what extent are pupils achieving competencies set forth in the minimum standards as elaborated in the High School Graduation Requirements?
14	4. To what extent are Oregon's students achieving knowledge skills as compared to students in the nation?
13	5. What are the school district characteristics which relate to differences in pupil achievement? e.g., district size, location, wealth.
7	6. What are the school characteristics which relate to differences in pupil achievement? e.g., school size, number of teachers, type of program.
16	7. What are the community characteristics which relate to differences in pupil achievement? e.g., urbanity, percent of welfare.
11-12	8. What are the pupil characteristics which relate to differences in pupil achievement? e.g., sex, race, number of brothers and sisters, mobility.
15	9. What are the family characteristics (SES) which relate to differences in pupil achievement? e.g., family income, parents' education.
6	10. To what extent are achievement levels changing (increasing or decreasing) in instruction-related areas identified as OBE priority needs?
10	11. What additional instruction-related areas should be identified as OBE priority needs?
11-12	12. What achievement-related district, school, community, family, and pupil characteristics should teacher in-service programs emphasize to increase pupil achievement?
8	13. What subject matter content should be emphasized in in-service programs to strengthen pupil achievement?
5	14. In what subject matter content is pupil achievement lowest?
2-3	15. To what extent are achievement levels changing (increasing or decreasing) in the instructional areas receiving emphasis?
9	16. In what goal areas is pupil achievement lowest?

APPENDIX B

STATEMENT OF PURPOSES

1. To meet the public's right to know about the current status of student knowledge, skills and attitudes throughout the state.

2. To provide descriptive information about the status of student performance in a variety of educational settings, and to identify areas in need of further research.

3. To provide information about areas of student performance most needing improvement, and to make recommendations for corrective action.

4. To provide information about the most important outcomes of Oregon education, and to stimulate continuing debate about the purposes of Oregon education.

APPENDIX C

OUR PROBLEM-SOLVING SYSTEM

OUR PROBLEM-SOLVING SYSTEM

To achieve the statewide goals and accomplish the Board priorities, goal-based planning been introduced. It is called the Department's problem-solving system. Each process of system is outlined here, together with the procedures for implementing the system and resulting products.

PROCESS	PROCEDURES	PRODUCTS
1. SET (or revise) GOALS	Identify societal needs for educational programs through advisory committees, public forums, and legislative and Board hearings.	Oregon Revised utes
	Translate identified needs into statewide educational goals; secure public validation.	Oregon State Boa Education Goals Elementary and S dary Education
2. ASSESS CURRENT STATUS OF OREGON'S SCHOOL SYSTEM	Conduct regular statewide testing to measure student progress toward achieving educational goals.	State assessm reports
	Collect statistical information about conditions which affect school district ability to help students achieve educational goals.	Assessment guid and models (u development)
		Statistical summari
	Collect statistical and other information (e.g., figures on employment, accidents or health for teenagers and young adults) which indicates ability of students to function in life roles.	*Indicators and S wide Assessm* (1973 survey report)*
		Indicator data (under developmen
3. IDENTIFY SCHOOL SYSTEM NEEDS; 4. ASSIGN PRIORITIES; 5. ESTABLISH OBJECTIVES FOR MEETING PRIORITY NEEDS	Analyze assessment data to determine specific areas in which school district programs may be improved.	*Emerging Trends Educational Plan* (monthly newslet
	Recommend to the State Board the needs that should be given priority.	Oregon State Boa Education Prio and Proposed Ac plishments
	Identify what changes should be made (proposed accomplishments) to effect needed improvements.	Planning Statem *Career Education Oregon**
	Publish planning statements which describe the priority needs and proposed accomplishments.	*Dignity and Worth**
		Emphasis on Preve (reading)*
	Encourage school districts to use state-level planning statements as guides for developing similar statements of commitment to achieving improvements in priority area.	*Improving Primary ucation**
		Within Reach (munity college d opment)*
		Systems Seven (school finance)*
		*Educational Perso Development**
6. IDENTIFY ALTERNATIVES 7. SELECT PROGRAM PLANS 8. ALLOCATE RESOURCES	Assign responsibility for accomplishing priority objectives to appropriate department program directors who:	
	(a) Investigate alternative methods for accomplishing objectives.	*Promising Practice Oregon Education Adopter's Guides**
	(b) Study the cost-effectiveness of the alternatives and select the most feasible.	

PROCESS	PROCEDURES	PRODUCTS
	(c) Propose budget allocations for staff time, materials, equipment and facilities.	
	(d) Justify requested allocations in budget reviews by the State Board, the Governor and the Legislature	Biennial budget
9 IMPLEMENT AND OPERATE PROGRAM PLANS	Assign responsibility for meeting program objectives to program specialist. Develop individual work plans.	Curriculum Guides Administration Manuals *School Laws**
	Use work plans as basis for monitoring general progress toward objectives and evaluating individual performance.	Resource handbooks
		Position papers
		In-service programs
		Administrative Rules for Oregon Education*
10 EVALUATE PROGRAM PLANS AND OUTCOMES	Identify actual plan outcomes.	***Department of Education Performance Indicator Report***
	Identify discrepancies between the actual and planned outcomes.	
	Identify needed changes in plan.	***Oregon State Board of Education Biennial Report***

* Copies of publications may be obtained by writing to Mrs. Ellen Hassler, Documents Clerk, Oregon Department of Education, 942 Lancaster Drive NE, Salem, Oregon 97310. Phone 378-3589. For information on other publications and products, write to the Communications Section at the above address.